

Etiquette in your country

Colombia

- Gifts are never opened in public unless the giver insists.
- After finishing dinner, expect to stay for a few hours. Leaving right away might be perceived as that you were there only for a free meal.
- Avoid discussing the drug trade. This is a delicate subject in Colombia.
- The elderly are given high respect; men are often referred to as Don and women as Doña, followed by their first names.
- There is a strong sense of cultural regionalism in Colombian society. Many Colombians (especially but not exclusively the older generation) identify themselves first with their home region, then their nationality. This is particular true in Antioquia and Valle departments. Bogota for being Colombia's mixing pot might not necessarily reflect such regional identity.
- Colombians that do not know each other typically begin every issue with small talk, no matter how trivial. "Getting to the point" immediately might be seen as impatient and impolite.
- Colombians have a great variety of regional accents. If you speak fluent Spanish, do not try to imitate the accents, for it may be viewed unfavorably by some.
- It is considered improper and slightly immature for adult men to wear shorts (except in recreational areas, such as parks, the beach, or pools).
- It is not usually acceptable to drop by someone's house without calling.
- In most areas, it is common for men to greet women friends kissing once on the cheek.
- It is considered polite to say thanks after common actions such as someone opening a door, offering or giving something to drink or eat, or when plates are taken from the table, and after most routine actions whenever they are not expected.
- When referring to someone's height in a conversation Colombians usually make a distinction between animals and humans in a visual manner by positioning their hand with the palm facing the floor when talking about animals and with the palm facing to the side (like when one is to give a handshake) when talking about humans height.
- Most Colombian women in urban areas respond gladly to decent male flattering (known as *piropo*). This is quite different from other countries where such expressions could be seen as sexual advances.
- People in Bogota and the center region of Colombia and to a lesser degree in some other parts of the country could be sensitive to the use of formal and informal Spanish. For example in a business meeting might not be appropriate to use the informal you (*tu*) instead the formal you is used (*usted*).
- In Bogota the wearing of sandals or open shoes by women is frowned upon in some exclusive commercial locations.
- Unlike the US, most (if not all) restaurants include the tip in the total amount to be paid by the costumer, you may choose to not pay it anyway

Ecuador

- Visitors to Ecuador often marvel at the brightly-colored traditional attire of natives. However, it is impolite to photograph someone before asking permission. Some people will ask for a tip in exchange for this favor and to begrudge them this source of income is considered unkind. Moreover, do not dress in traditional attire; this will be perceived as mocking the local culture. Only the natives are entitled to do so.
- Beachwear should only be worn at the beach and not in towns. The same with short pants for adults.
- Never refer to someone as an "Indian", unless they happen to consider themselves so.
- Men greet women, and women greet women, kissing once on the cheek. Not doing it is considered impolite.
- When invited, it is consider impolite not to bring a present. (If not asked, never bring food, more appropriate would be flowers, wine, chocolates or a small toy for the host's child) The same when you are (even for a short time) meeting someone at their home and they offer snacks or something to drink. It is often polite to decline the first time, but not accepting later would be consider impolite.
- Dance: Ecuadorian styles are more based on Andean and Colombian.
- There is a strong sense of regionalism in Ecuadorian society. Many Ecuadorians identify themselves first with their home region (especially if they are from the coast or the highland), then their nationality.
- Do not use the phrases "in America" or "I'm from America" when referring to the United States. America is a continent, not just the United States.
- Politics are nowadays a very controversial subject in the country. One should avoid talking about religion, politics, money or illness at dinner with (not so close) friends and strangers.
- To blow one's nose in public, while eating or in a room is considered vulgar and one should try to avoid it. The same rule applies in Venezuela.
- Ecuadorian society, like in most South American countries, is very conservative and foreigners should observe this and try to behave like their peers.
- Like in most South American countries, unmarried childless (young) women should always be referred to as "señorita" and not "señora", otherwise you could offend them. If unsure, it's better to say "señorita". If married, she will feel herself flattered and will immediately correct it. In addition, asking women about their age is considered rude.
- Women expect doors to be opened for them by males, be helped with luggage etc. These actions are not construed as flirtatious.
- When dealing with someone with an academic degree in a formal (e.g. at work) situation, it is usual to mention it. (Ingeniero/a, Licenciado/a, Doctor/a, Abogado/a, Economista, Contador/a, Arquitecto/a) If used outside a formal situation (e.g. between friends), the titles might sound sarcastic.
- People's hygiene habits are very important, especially in the tropical climate of Guayaquil or other tropical cities in the country. People are expected to take one or more baths or showers daily. Body odor, unshaven legs and underarms in women, ugly or dirty bare feet, or wrinkled clothing and dirty shoes are considered disgusting. Many men wear cologne and have a comb with them. Women usually wear high heels. Never use sport (running) shoes at a formal restaurant, work or going out with friends at night.

Peru

- Waving at a stranger is awkward and should be avoided.
- Using your index finger to motion a person to approach you, as practiced in the United States and other places, is considered rude. A more polite way to beckon someone is to place the palm down and gently sweep your fingers toward you.
- In a gathering, you must greet each and everyone, especially the eldest.
- In churches and monasteries, err on the side of modesty in your dress.
- Discussion of drugs and religion should be handled with great tact.
- In a country in which nearly half the population is Amerindian, expressing respect for native peoples is important. Try to refer to them not as *indios*, which is a derogatory term, but as *indígenas*.
- Peruvians shake hands frequently and tirelessly, and although kissing on the cheek is a common greeting for acquaintances; it is not practiced among strangers. Amerindian populations are more conservative and even shy. They don't kiss to greet one another, nor do they shake hands as frequently as other Peruvians; if they do, it is a light brush of the hand rather than a firm grip. Many Indians from small villages are reluctant to look a stranger in the eye.
- Photographing military, police, or airport installations is strictly forbidden. Many churches, convents, and museums also do not allow photography or video.
- Peru, like most of South America, has a problematic history with politics. It is advised not to bring in political issues casually.

Venezuela

- In Venezuela, it is often considered rude to point at a person or even an object with the index finger. People typically point with the whole hand or with a movement of the head and a puckering of the lips towards that which is being indicated.
- In many situations, punctuality is less important than it is for people elsewhere. Showing up exactly on schedule for a party or gathering is undesirable. However, punctuality is expected for work.
- People tend to stand very close together when carrying on a conversation. Venezuelans often touch each other's arms or shoulders during it.
- Coffee or a cold drink is typically offered to guests. It is often polite to decline.
- Street directions are expected to be given in a very detailed manner, very often describing trees and the color of buildings near by. Omitting an obvious landmark such as a mango tree or a bright red wall is considered careless.
- When a male is introduced to a female, it's expected for the male to make the motion and kiss the female once on the cheek along with a handshake. The handshake should start gentle and match to the female's grip.
- When visiting someone's home, remember to bring along something for the house. For example, a small decorative piece if you are familiar with the decorative style, a dessert, or a bottle of the man of the house's favorite alcoholic beverage. For an informal lunch visit, it is common to bring fresh bread from one of the numerous bakeries, desserts, soda, wine, or beer. For breakfast, white cheese or shredded beef for the arepas are always welcome. In any case, it is always rude to show up empty-handed.

- Phrases like "in America" or "I'm from America" when referring to the United States is confusing to Latin American people as America is a continent, not just the United States. Therefore, all people born in the American continent are Americans. People from the United States of America are referred to by their nationality, "estadounidense."
- For business or informal matters, it is good practice to follow up morning appointments with an invitation to lunch.
- Unlike lunch, dinner is for socializing, not for business.
- When dining, wait until everyone is served before beginning to eat.
- Before starting to eat, saying "Buen provecho"(lit. I hope the food is good for you) is expected to wish the others at the table a good meal. The others will say "gracias" and repeat the phrase "buen provecho" so everybody at the table has a good meal.
- Avoid making noises with you cutlery on the plate. Do not bite on your fork or spoon.
- Meals are to be enjoyed with conversations, as long as there are not mouths showing food in it. Swallow first-talk later, or cover your mouth while with food in it.
- To indicate you have finished eating, place your cutlery in parallel and diagonally across your plate.
- Expect to stay for a couple more hours more after dinner, leaving right away might be perceived as that you were there only for a free meal. Coffee and liqueur, will be offered.
- To blow one's nose in public, while eating or in a room is considered vulgar and disgusting, and one should try to avoid it. The restroom is the appropriate place to do it.
- When entering a room with other people, it is a friendly and informal gesture to say just "Buenas" instead of the full "buenos días" (good morning) or "buenas tardes" (good afternoon). However it is always appropriate to say the complete "buenos días" and "buenas tardes/noches" in formal situations.
- Shorts and other forms of beachwear are appropriate only in those environments.
- When someone sneezes, you should say "Salúd" (lit. "Health"). The person who sneezed should respond with "Gracias" ("Thank you").

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etiquette_in_Latin_America#Colombia